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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Syria-Lebanon Rice European
Visit and Renditions IraqPARIS - Wednesday, December 14, 2005
(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT: Syria-Lebanon
Rice European Visit and Renditions
IraqB) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE: Domestic social and economic issues
dominate, with France's national debt in the lead in several
outlets. Liberation devotes a harsh editorial to Assad's
involvement in recent assassinations in Lebanon, calling the
international community to "not allow him to go unpunished."
Le Figaro's editorial urges France and the U.S. to support
Lebanon's PM's "courageous" request for an international
tribunal. (See Part C)

Iraq and the legislative elections are today's second
international story. Le Figaro titles one of its stories:
"France, Concerned for the Region, Is No Longer Eager to See

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the Americans Leave." In his report Alain Barluet contrasts France's position before the war and now, quoting Interior Minister Villepin in his interview last week with CNN. (See Part C)

Les Echos carries an opinion piece by editorialist Sergio Romano entitled: "Europe-U.S.: A Strange Cordiality" in which he contends that "Rice's visit did not dissipate every misunderstanding" regarding rendition flights and torture. (See Part C)

Two summits, the WTO in Hong Kong and the EU summit in Brussels elicit commentaries on the difficulties both summits face in reaching agreements, as well as the need to succeed, despite the difficulties. Catholic La Croix leads with tomorrow's EU Summit on the budget and headlines "Barroso Confident in Europe's Strength." Barroso gives an interview in which he states: "Failure this week would have negative economic consequences for the new members. No one would gain from a new European crisis." On the WTO Ministerial he says: "We would all gain from a successful summit in Hong Kong because Europe leads in matters of trade." The editorial suggests that the EU summit will be a "bartering session between friends." Les Echos carries an op-ed by British Ambassador Sir John Holmes titled "Our Project for Europe" to explain Blair's EU budget proposals: "I believe that the negotiations, although difficult, can lead to a successful agreement at the EU summit. Everyone will have to make an effort, even if everyone may not come out a winner. But the need for justice must apply to everyone, including Great Britain." Le Monde carries an open letter from WTO Director Pascal Lamy to participating Ministers: "These negotiations could turn out to be the most complex ever. You will need political courage in the next few days. Either we close the Cycle at the end of 2006, or the entire world trade system will lose its purpose."

Popular right-of-center Le Parisien devotes its lead to a Senate report which indicates that "every year in France, 600 000 blank passports and ID cards are stolen." Inside, a small article reports on the new passport and visa requirements to travel to the U.S. and comments: "France is unable at this date to provide (biometric) passports. They will begin to be issued during the first semester of 2006. Some French travelers may therefore see their trips to the U.S. compromised. The U.S. Embassy in Paris is unable to satisfy all the visa requests. People living outside Paris are doubly penalized because they have to travel to Paris for their visas, which costs 90 euros." The story was also reported this morning on France 2 television. Le Figaro equally notes: "Visas: U.S. Embassy Swamped."

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The tenth anniversary of the Dayton-Paris Accords is noted in Liberation: "This anniversary reminds the Europeans of their tragic inaction then, and the primary role that is theirs today in the pacification and reconstruction of the region."

The execution of 'Tookie' Williams is front-paged in Le Monde and communist l'Humanite which titles: "Blood on America's Hands." France Soir titles its story: "Terminator Executes Tookie." Le Figaro focuses on the "changed man" and the "remarkable transformation" of Williams.

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES: Syria- Lebanon

"Saddam Assad"

Patrick Sabatier in left-of-center Liberation (12/14): "In an interview with Time magazine, Syria's al-Assad tried to convince everyone he was not another Saddam Hussein, that he wanted to cooperate with the UN. But the Mehlis report proves Syria has not cooperated. Assad is increasingly looking like the brains behind the recent attacks in Lebanon. Since Hariri's assassination, Syria is waging a real war in Lebanon. Everyone knows that the terrorists who are killing in Beirut get their orders from Syria. Assad, like Saddam before him, has chosen a strategy of tension. against the international community. His wager is that it will not try to destabilize Syria and Lebanon, for fear that the chaos that reigns in Iraq might spread, thus playing into the hands of Islamic forces. He knows that some UN members are, out of principle, against sanctions. But the UN, although it is not all that credible, must not back down: it must punish Assad, investigate the Hariri assassination fully, as well other assassinations. It must isolate Assad until he gives up on his dream of annexation of Lebanon. Or until his own people topples him and serves him a fate similar to Saddam's."

"The Lebanese Stakes"

Pierre Rousselin in right-of-center Le Figaro (12/14): "Lebanon continues to pay the price for freeing itself from Syrian interference. The latest assassination proves to what extent terror is the only way for Damascus to keep its hold on Lebanon. Skeptics will counter by saying that nothing has changed and that international pressure, for once jointly applied by Washington and Paris, only serves to push Bashar-al-Assad into a corner and to become more dangerous than ever. all the while discrediting the UN and mocking America's powerlessness because stuck in the sands of Iraq. Others may even go so far as to denounce Paris's rallying with American diplomatic efforts to bring about change in the Middle East. While the Mehlis report does not explicitly point to Syria.

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clues are beginning to emerge. This is why the investigation into Harriri's assassination must continue. No one must oppose the Lebanese PM's courageous initiative in asking for an international tribunal. France and the U.S. must do everything so that this initiative can succeed."

Rice European Visit and Renditions

"Europe-U.S.: A Strange Cordiality"

Sergio Romano in right-of-center Les Echos (12/14): "During her recent trip, Condoleezza Rice tried to pacify America's allies with reassuring remarks. The UN Convention on torture would be respected and errors, if any were made, would be rectified. But other voices, (Dick Cheney's) spoke differently. But the fact is that during her trip, Secretary Rice changed course. Before her trip, she reminded European governments, not without some arrogance, about America's role in safeguarding them from terrorism. At the end of her trip, having noted the nature of European public opinion, she thought it necessary to adopt a different approach. Must we conclude then that the entente has become once again cordial? Europe and the U.S. share too many common interests to let differences affect their relationship for too long. But it would be dangerous to delude ourselves. The controversy of the past weeks (about renditions and torture.) illustrate a philosophy adopted by the U.S. which is clearly in

contradiction with that of European countries. For a large part of the American political class, the end of the Cold War meant an opportunity for America's might to become free and expand in all directions. After the election of President Bush and 9/11, the trend intensified. Today, there exists an American space of security which goes beyond America's geographical boundaries and in which Washington believes it can operate as it pleases. If Europe hopes to build its identity and its sovereignty, it cannot accept this philosophy."

Iraq

"France, Concerned for the Region, Is No Longer Eager to See the Americans Leave."

Alain Barluet in right-of-center Le Figaro (12/14): "After standing up against the war, France today is rather in favor of Americans staying in Iraq. In an interview last week on CNN, PM Villepin warned that 'chaos in Iraq, which would be a disaster for the region, needs to be avoided at all costs.' France is not so eager to see the Americans leave Iraq because it is aware of the threats that hover over the country and the region. In this context, the legislative elections are seen by

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Paris as an important step towards the stabilization of Iraq. The difficult situation with Syria and Iran has prompted Paris to rethink American troop withdrawal. Seen from Paris, America's presence (in Iraq) has not reduced the terrorist threat. Revelations about CIA secret prisons and renditions via European airports have cast a new shadow on America's war against terror. But it is undeniable that these practices have elicited few and weak official reactions, including from France." STAPLETON

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